



# Pediatric Dry Skin

Too much bathing and soap removes the skin's natural oils. This is the main cause of dry skin in children. Dry climates make it worse, as does winter weather ("winter itch"). Dry skin is less common in teenagers because their oil glands are more active.

Dry, rough, bumpy skin on the back of the upper arms is called keratosis pilaris. Dry, pale spots on the face are called pityriasis alba. Both are complications of over-washing dry skin with soap. The dry areas are often itchy, and this is the main symptom of dry skin.

Cracked skin most commonly occurs on the soles of the feet, especially the heels and big toes. Deep cracks are painful and periodically bleed. The main cause is moderate to heavy sweating of feet or wearing wet shoes and socks or swimming a lot.

Cracks can also develop on the hands of children who frequently have wet hands (washing dishes or sucking their thumbs). Children who have the habit of licking their lips may get cracked (chapped) lips. Lips may also become chapped from excessive exposure to sun or wind.

## Caring for your child

### Soap and bathing

If your child has dry skin and is not yet a teenager, avoid all soaps, detergents, and bubble baths. They take the natural oils out of the skin. Have your child bathe or shower with plain water, perhaps twice a week. Don't let a bar of soap float around in the tub. Keep the water temperature cool to lukewarm as hot water irritates the skin

For teenagers buy a special soap for dry skin. Teenagers can get by with applying soap only to the armpits, genitals, and feet. Do not use any soap on itchy areas. Don't lather up (the skin often becomes dry for this reason). Rinse well.

### Lubricating cream for dry skin

Buy a large bottle of an unscented lubricating cream. Apply the cream to any dry or itchy areas several times a day, and especially after bathing. You will probably have to continue this throughout the winter. If the itch persists after 4 days, use 1% hydrocortisone cream (nonprescription) for a week. Vaseline is probably the

cheapest and best option, but some find it greasy and it can make a mess of clothing and bed linens.

### **Humidifier**

If your house is dry - if you have static electricity - then you need to run a room humidifier in your child's room. During cold weather, your child should wear gloves outside to protect against the rapid evaporation of moisture from the hands.

### **Bath oils**

It does not make much sense to pour bath oils into the bath water; most of the oil goes down the drain. It also makes the bathtub slippery and dangerous. If you prefer bath oil over hand lotion, apply it immediately after baths. Baby oil (mineral oil) is inexpensive and keeps skin moisture from evaporating. You may also use olive oil.

### **Ointments for cracked skin**

Even deep cracks that have been a problem for years can be healed in about 2 weeks if they are constantly covered with an ointment (like petroleum jelly). If the crack seems mildly infected, use an antibiotic ointment (no prescription needed). Apply ointments 4 times a day. Covering the ointment with a Band-Aid, socks, or gloves speeds recovery even more. For chapped lips a lip balm can be applied frequently.